DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 392 CE 075 867

TITLE Eight Key School-to-Work System Building Elements. Resource Bulletin.

INSTITUTION National School-to-Work Opportunities Office, Washington, DC.

PUB DATE 1997-11-00

NOTE 7p.

AVAILABLE FROM National School-to-Work Learning and Information Center, 400 Virginia Avenue, Room 150, Washington, DC 20024; 800-251-7236; e-mail: stw-lc@ed.gov; http://www.stw.ed.gov

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Education Work Relationship; Educational Legislation; Educational Resources; *Educational Trends; *Federal Legislation; *Inservice Teacher Education; Internship Programs; On the Job Training; *Professional Development; School Business Relationship; Secondary Education; Teacher Role; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 puts in place a framework to help state and local partnerships in their efforts to build systems that help young people make the transition from school to careers and lifelong learning. School-to-work does not establish new programs; instead, it synthesizes existing models and programs to make systemic changes in the way youth are educated and prepared for work and life. Eight core elements have been identified as essential in building school-to-work systems: (1) opportunities for all youth; (2) a continuum of school-to-work elements in the core curriculum; (3) professional development; (4) exploration of all aspects of an industry; (5) employer and labor union involvement; (6) support for career majors; (7) establishment of substate structures; and (8) promotion of accountability. (This bulletin includes a brief explanation of each of the eight elements. Following each explanation is a state or local example of a school-to-work initiative that incorporates the system element. A list of contacts for each example ends the bulletin.) (KC)

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ED 416 392

Eight Key School-to-Work System Building Elements

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 puts in place a clear, comprehensive framework to help state and local partnerships in their efforts to build systems that help young people make the transition from school to careers and lifelong learning. School-to-work does not establish new programs; instead, it synthesizes existing models and programs to make systemic changes in the way we educate and prepare all youth in America for work and life.

Since the Act became law, the National School-to-Work Office, working with state and local partnerships across the nation, has identified and refined eight core elements that are essential to building school-to-work systems. These eight elements help states and local partnerships plan and implement school-to-work as a long-term, systemic reform, rather than a patchwork of educational reforms or training programs. School-to-work systems are built on: 1) opportunities for all youth; 2) a continuum of school-to-work elements in the core curriculum; and 3) professional development. They allow students to explore 4) all aspects of an industry; encourage 5) employer and labor union involvement; support 6) career majors; establish 7) sub-state structures; and promote 8) accountability. As school-to-work systems are implemented across the nation, the National School-to-Work Office continually revisits these elements to help pinpoint what is possible, what is unrealistic, and what is essential.

This bulletin includes a brief explanation of each of the eight system-building pieces. Following each explanation is a state or local example of a school-to-work initiative that incorporates the system element, and, finally, a list of contacts for each example.

1. Opportunities for All Youth. A primary objective of school-to-work is to discard categorical approaches targeting specific populations and to build a system in which all young people experience a rigorous, integrated sequence of career guidance, coursework, and work-based learning. Every young person's learning experience should include activities that connect learning in the classroom with applications of that learning beyond the classroom walls, particularly in the workplace. The term "all youth" includes regular students, disadvantaged students, at-risk students, students with disabilities, school dropouts, special populations, and academically talented students.

All youth in school-to-work systems are expected to satisfy rigorous academic and skill standards. School-to-work systems should be designed to balance flexible components that can be adapted to the diverse needs of young people while maintaining a foundation of high expectations and standards. Whether they intend to go on to college or enter the workforce directly out of high school, school-to-work provides young people with a purpose and a context for learning, the opportunity to explore a variety of careers, and the motivation to achieve their goals.

An example of a comprehensive school-to-work system serving all youth is the STARS (Students Taking Authentic Routes to Success) program at the **David Douglas High School**. David Douglas is located in east Portland, Oregon, and serves 1,852 students. Since 1991, David Douglas has been recognized as a leader throughout Oregon for working in partnership with the Oregon Business Council to redesign its high school program to meet the expectations of the Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century. In 1996, it was selected as one of ten schools to be showcased by the U.S. Department of Education as a New American High School.

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Drawn from an urban community, the school has a population with a variety of talents, special needs, and interests. Every student in the school is involved in Project STARS, which focuses on helping students identify and plan for long-term educational and career goals. Students begin initial career exploration activities in middle school, followed by an intense semester of career exploration in the ninth and tenth grades. A flexible, individualized education plan is developed for every student, including disadvantaged and academically talented students, outlining a strategy for the high school years and beyond. Much like a college curriculum, the 9th and 10th grades are devoted primarily to general studies, and the 11th and 12th grades are devoted to working within a major area of study, such as Arts and Communication, or Business and Management.

2. A Continuum of School-to-Work Elements in the Core Curriculum. School-to-work elements should be incorporated into the curricula of grades K-12 and postsecondary in progressive steps, building upon a foundation of rigorous academic standards. The school-based and work-based activities in an integrated curriculum provide a context for learning that grows richer and more challenging as the student matures. The progressive steps begin with career awareness at the elementary school level, which consist of activities designed to increase students' awareness of the broad range of occupational opportunities; career exploration at the middle school level, giving students more in-depth exposure to career options; and career exposure in high school, defined as "activities that provide actual work experience that connects classroom learning to work." Options for students after high school include direct entry into further skill training, the workforce, or enrollment in a postsecondary institution. Postsecondary institutions, including career, technical, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges or universities, can play an important role in students' transitions to successful paths after high school. Many local partnerships develop articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions that address issues such as dual enrollment and obtaining credit for work-based learning.

In the State of Utah, schools are grouped into "education cones," which are school articulation structures that promote the development of career education in grades K-12. In the **eber County School District**, the school-to-work curricula begin in the cone's seven elementary schools, with career awareness activities. For example, second graders who are working on weights and measurements in the classroom spend time in the fruits and vegetables section of their local grocery store to experience practical applications of their learning. In the cone's two junior high schools, the focus shifts to exploration. Students work with guidance counselors and teachers to focus on career options, and participate in job shadowing and mentoring experiences. In high school, students' activities shift toward substantive work-based learning experiences, such as internships and apprenticeships, which are integrated with school-based learning.

3. Professional Development. School-to-work brings together a variety of stakeholders throughout the community. In order to successfully implement a school-to-work system, staff development and training are necessary for all school-to-work partners, including school staff, parents, employers, employees, unions, and community-based organizations. Training activities aim to develop the knowledge and ability of all stakeholders to work together to integrate curricula and provide students with a variety of work-based and community-based learning experiences that are related to school-based instruction. Many school-to-work partnerships have found that interactive sessions provide participants with greater opportunities to develop collaborative relationships and experiment with the new roles, concepts, and activities than do traditional one-way lectures.

The State of **Massachusetts** contracted with the University of Massachusetts' Donahue Institute to be a staff development "broker" for the state's local partnerships. The Institute has assembled a corps of qualified technical assistance providers to assist partnerships in their efforts. In 1996, the professional development efforts included the "Summer of Work and Learning," in which two thousand teachers and counselors completed internships in

industry settings and gained exposure to the work world. To ensure the participation of new teachers, the deans of all Schools of Education in the University of Massachusetts system were convened to address new methods of teacher instruction. They are now developing a program major in contextual learning, including a three-credit course on school-to-work. Other activities in the state include coordinating local partnership training efforts, and contracting with community colleges to develop and launch a multi-module workplace mentor training curriculum.

4. All Aspects of an Industry. School-to-work gives students the opportunity to explore a variety of jobs in an industry or career cluster. This broad approach to work-based learning ensures that students are exposed to every aspect of an industry--including sales and marketing, management and finance, technical skills, labor and community issues, health and safety, and even environmental issues--in an integrated instructional system. Experiences in all aspects of an industry can equip students with a greater awareness of their career options, more transferrable skills, and increased mobility within an industry.

The **Baltimore Finance Academy**, a magnet school within Lake Clifton-Eastern High School in Baltimore, Maryland, requires every student to be exposed to a broad spectrum of knowledge in the financial industry. A freshman year course entitled Exploring Financial Careers introduces students to a variety of career choices, including accounting, insurance, investment, and international finance. During their sophomore, junior, and senior years, students complete courses in accounting, economics, financial markets, security, business planning and development, banking and credit, international finances, and a quantitative course in the principles of finance. These career-oriented courses build upon three semesters of computer applications and core courses in English, math, social studies, and science. In addition, students use their knowledge of finance in a range of work-based learning internships in one of 26 companies.

5. Employer and Labor Union Involvement. Employer and union involvement is essential for bringing school-to-work initiatives to scale. Employers and union leaders can be involved in school-to-work in a number of ways--providing leadership and acting as a catalyst for change, working with other partners in system planning and curriculum development, serving on advisory councils, and providing work-based learning opportunities for students and teachers. Many school-to-work partnerships are designing employer/union recruitment strategies that incorporate a "menu" of options for participation, allowing employers and union leaders to select a level or type of participation that fits both their economic and philanthropic needs. For example, if employers choose to provide work-based learning experiences for students, they can select low intensity activities, such as participating in career awareness days and job-shadowing, or more intensive activities that include mentoring and apprenticeships.

Labor unions, especially in the skilled trades and manufacturing, have a long history of collaborating with employers on the development of apprenticeship programs that link classroom-based learning with on-the-job training. Unions represent millions of front-line workers in both the public and private sectors and provide an ideal mechanism for building grassroots worker support for the shadowing, mentoring, and work-based learning that are essential building blocks of a school-to-work system.

The National Employer Leadership Council (NELC), a coalition of CEOs from a diverse group of private sector companies, has been formed to enhance the quality of the nation's workforce and to improve the productivity and competitiveness of American business through work-based learning opportunities for all students. NELC has created an Employer Participation Model, which outlines ways companies can get involved in school-to-work.

The **South King County Consortium**, a school-to-work system situated just outside Seattle, Washington, includes representatives from major employers such as Boeing, U.S. West, and Health Tecna; small industries; and labor organizations, including the International

Association of Machinists. The Consortium is made up of employers; all K-12 school districts in the region, including teachers and student leaders; postsecondary institutions; community organizations; and other stakeholders. One of their key objectives is to demonstrate how school-to-work systems can support new approaches to meet the workforce demands of any fast growing industry that is critical to the local, state, and national economy. For example, two major industry and labor partners--U.S. West and Communication Workers of America--participate in the Consortium to develop a comprehensive array of school-based and work-based activities to prepare young people for high-wage, high-skill employment in the expanding telecommunications industry.

6. Career Majors. Career majors structure a student's educational experiences around a broad career theme and provide students a context for learning as well as opportunities to use their experiences in the classroom and the workplace to help determine what they might or might not want to do. In a career major, students can gain a better understanding of the kinds of experience, skills, education, and training they will need to be successful in the career of their choice.

Optimally, a career major is a sequenced program of school-based activities and experiential learning that can take place in the workplace or elsewhere. These experiences balance the acquisition of knowledge with the application of that knowledge. A career major, such as business, health care, or technology, generally coincides with state and local labor market information to ensure the relevance of student learning to available jobs. All career majors should incorporate skill standards and academic standards and may require some restructuring of the school day to allow for block scheduling, interdisciplinary instruction, and work-based learning.

Central Valley High School in Verdale, Washington, uses Student Career Opportunity Paths in Education (SCOPE) to organize curriculum, career guidance, community resources, and the school environment around student career aspirations. School staff, working with specialists in occupational analysis, identified six career majors which serve as the context for individualized education at Central Valley. The career majors reflect the strengths of the existing curriculum, the regional economy, and state educational requirements. Students are introduced to the six career majors in the eighth grade. A flexible five-year education plan, which is designed to help motivate and guide students through the first year of postsecondary learning, is prepared by students, parents, and teachers. Students' interests and education plans are revisited and refined every year. Students in each career path take required academic courses and are provided with a variety of career-relevant options. The elective courses reflect the broad range of possibilities within each career path.

7. Sub-State Structures. The strength of state efforts to build and operate a statewide school-to-work system depends, in large part, on how the state establishes its sub-state structure--how it "rolls out" its implementation plan. The roll-out plan is a means for achieving statewide coverage by building local partnerships and a sub-state infrastructure incrementally over the course of the five-year period of Federal funding. The sub-state structure should help to align reforms in workforce development, economic development, and education at the local level. This may include coordination with existing structures and institutions such as one-stop career centers, workforce training programs, economic development areas, service delivery areas, counties, and school districts.

In **Iowa**, overall plans for sharing funds with regional and local partnerships include developing a regional support structure; funding local partnerships in a manner consistent with their readiness and needs; and establishing goals for expansion. Towards this end, fifteen regional partnerships have been created, each made up of a core membership composed of JTPA directors, community college presidents, representatives from the Department of Employment Services and the Private Industry Council, administrators from the Area Education Agency, a transition specialist, and representatives from the Department of Human Services, Regional Planning Boards, local school districts, and the Job Service

Employer Council. Each region must create a detailed work plan to receive a base grant. Regional partnerships play an integral part in the state's efforts to disburse funds and establish school-to-work opportunities, and are responsible for assisting local partnerships as they implement school-to-work.

At the local level, grant awards are made based on level of readiness. System Design Grants are non-competitive and awarded on a first come, first serve basis to local partnerships who have identified key partners, created a vision, and indicated a firm commitment to developing a plan. System Building Grants, the next level, are subject to a peer review group and awarded on a competitive basis. To be selected, local partners must show that they are ready to begin revising curricula, developing integrated school-based and work-based learning and expanding the career development system. Partnerships applying for these grants that already provide these services to students must show growth in their programs in terms of the number of students served. System Expansion Grants, the final stage, are highly competitive and awarded to partnerships that can prove and demonstrate growth and plans for growth, with an emphasis on plans and processes for establishing postsecondary links.

The State of **West Virginia** focuses its energies on developing partnerships at the school district level. West Virginia awards one year implementation grants to partnerships that demonstrate a high degree of readiness, with follow-up funds available for enhancement and capacity building. Regional partnerships receive grant monies with an understanding that they need to complete a number of regional assessments, including a needs assessment and a self evaluation of school-to-work implementation abilities and efforts at the postsecondary level. In addition, the state requests that partnerships participate in regional level informational and staff development activities around school-to-work. The state collaborates with, and encourages local partnerships to collaborate with, other groups working on workforce, economic, and community development. Thus far, West Virginia's roll-out strategy has produced cooperative relations between the state and local partnerships, resulting in a better understanding and commitment to school-to-work throughout the state.

8. Accountability. All partners are individually and jointly accountable for the success of the school-to-work system. School-to-work initiatives should use process and outcome evaluations and continuous data collection and analysis to help build accountability into their systems. These efforts help stakeholders determine state and local progress in creating systems, identify promising practices and measure student and system outcomes. They can also be used as a tool for outlining the nature and extent of participation of stakeholders. A key challenge in building accountability is identifying the appropriate information, while putting fair standards and measurement tools in place that promote the continuous improvement necessary to ensure the success of a school-to-work system.

Massachusetts established 12 benchmarks as the foundation of state and local system-building and progress measurement to help promote accountability. These benchmarks were developed by a task force of directors composed of nine of the state's 16 regional employment boards--Massachusetts's vehicles for managing sub-state roll out, and the state's technical assistance network. Every regional education board selects those benchmarks which are applicable to its area and incorporates them into work plans negotiated with each local school-to-work partnership in that region. The state also has contracted with an external evaluator to measure progress and help refine local systems and the overall state effort. The evaluator is developing a computerized data collection tool that covers Federal and state reporting requirements to reduce local partnerships' reporting burden. Quarterly reports by local partnerships include activities and progress toward objectives and the various funding sources that are integrated to support school-to-work. These activities show how the state is beginning the long-term process of aligning priorities, measures, and funding for continuous improvement.

Contacts for Examples

Element 1: All Youth.
David Douglas High School: Jeanne Yerkovich, School-to-Work Coordinator, David Douglas High School, 1001 S.E. 135th Avenue, Portland, OR 97233 (503) 252-2900 (x339).

Element 2: A Continuum of School-to-Work Elements In the Core Curriculum.
Weber County School District: Sherilyn Gerber, Student Services Coordinator, Weber County School District, 5320 South Adams Avenue, Ogden, UT 84405 (801) 476-7800.

Elements 3 & 8: Professional Development & Accountability
Massachusetts Office for School to Work Transition: Kathleen Flynn, Director of Local Partnerships, 350 Main Street, Boston, MA 02148 (617) 388-3300.

Element 4: All Aspects of Industry.
Baltimore Finance Academy: Kathy Floyd, Baltimore Finance Academy Director, Lake Clifton High School, 2801 St. Lo Drive, Baltimore, MD 21213 (410) 467-6307.

Element 5: Employer and Labor Union Involvement.
National Employer Leadership Council (NELC): Burt Menninga, Communications Associate, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310 Washington, DC 20036 i (202) 822-8027.

South King County Consortium: Christine Stone-Ewing, Green River Community College/South King County Tech Prep, 12401 Southeast 320th Street, Auburn, WA 98092 (206) 833-9111.

Element 6: Career Majors.
Central Valley High School: Mike Pearson, 19307 Cataldo, Green Acres, WA 99016 (509) 922-6735.

Element 7: Sub-State Structures.
Iowa School-to-Work Office: Laurie Phelan, Co-Director, 150 Des Moines Street, Des Moines, IA 50319 (515)281-9040.

West Virginia School-to-Work: Ron Grimes, Director, State Capitol Building, Room 151, 1900 Kanawha Building East, Charleston, WV 25305 (304) 558-2389.

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